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AUTHOR Smith-Stevenson, Ruthie; Saul, Charles E.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that analyzed the extent of burnout among Mississippi high school principals. Specifically, it identified the level of burnout among Mississippi high school principals, the relationship between certain demographic variables and burnout, and the relationship between burnout and personality type. The level of burnout among high school principals in Mississippi schools as a total group as well as within specific demographic variables of age, sex, race, years of experience, school enrollment, level of education, and intent to remain in the job was measured by three subscales of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)--emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Data were collected through a survey comprised of the MBI, part 1 of the Leadership/Personality Compatibility Inventory (L/PCI), and demographic survey. The survey was mailed to 127 Mississippi high school principals in October 1993; 87 usable responses were received. Findings indicate that the principals had low to moderate levels of burnout as measured by the subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Data also show that respondents experienced a high degree of personal accomplishment in their work. However, because a sizeable number of the principals experienced moderate or high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in their roles, concern is warranted. Finally, principals with sympathetic personalities had significantly higher levels of emotional exhaustion than did those with bold or technical personalities. Four tables are included. Contains 13 references. (LMI)

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An Investigation Into Burnout Among Mississippi High School Principals

Ruthie Smith-Stevenson, Ph.D.
Canton Public School District

Charles E. Saul, Ed.D.
Jackson State University

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R. Smith-Stevenson

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the role of the principal has become increasingly complex. Teacher negotiations, staff evaluation, student due process, student files, discipline, book censorship, increased use of computers, merit pay for teachers, accountability, increasing school programs, fluctuating enrollments, and school funding problems have all complicated the tasks of school principals (Wood, Nicholson, & Findley, 1985).

According to Peterson (1978), principals average thirteen activities per hour, although the number can range from four to fifty. More than 85 percent of their time is spent on tasks of less than nine minutes duration, and 40 percent of their day is filled with activities initiated by others. Frustration can develop if the principal feels controlled by the job rather than in control of it.

Each role of a principal elicits different behavior and emotions. Since each interaction with a parent, worker, and child requires a different approach, an administrator must react like a chameleon in order to accommodate and show respect for individual characteristics. Such changes have a wearing effect. To switch rapidly and repeatedly from one role and behavior to another is stressful and exhausting (Cedoline, 1982).

The need to feel that one is pursuing a satisfying professional career, "job fit" between the individual and the

role must be present. In the case of schools, each school has its own character and atmosphere, just as each principal has his or her own personality and style. There are certain organizational conditions such as school size, locale, and level that may affect job-fit, but there are also personality variables that may be contributing factors. Both professional and organizational conditions coupled with personality variables contribute to individual-organizational congruency, leading to enhanced professional and personal effectiveness (Whitaker, 1992). Whitaker contends that, "Whether the profession can continue to attract quality educators to assume principal positions may depend on whether or not there is better job-fit between the role and the person. If congruence is lacking, burnout, leading to early retirement, may be a result" (p.87).

Presumably, the person who is burned out and has negative feelings and attitudes about clients will not be inspired to try harder for them, and will provide a minimal level of care at best (and possibly even poor care). This is a very serious consequence of burnout and is probably the bottom line for most agencies and institutions. Staff complaints and absenteeism are one thing, but bad treatment of clients is another (Maslach, 1982).

Statement of the Problem

The research problem under investigation in this study was an indepth analysis of the burnout situation that exists

among high school principals in Mississippi.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine and analyze the level of burnout among high school principals in Mississippi schools as a total group as well as within specific demographic variables of age, sex, race, years of experience, school enrollment, level of education, and intent to remain in the principalship position as measured by the three subscales (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Furthermore the study compared the differences between the categories of the demographic variables on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments. Additionally, principals were identified by personality type (bold, expressive, sympathetic, and technical) by using the Leadership/Personality Compatibility Inventory (L/PCI) and then these four personality types were compared on their level of burnout as measured by each of the three subscales of the MBI.

Description of the Population

High school principals in the state of Mississippi constitute the subjects for this study. Due to the variety of grades within the schools of Mississippi, it was impossible to categorize schools as elementary, middle, junior high, or high; therefore, for this study, only

principals in schools with grade designations of 9-12 and 10-12 were included in the population. The list of schools was taken from the Mississippi State Department of Education's Mississippi Educational Directory (1992). Information from the directory indicated that there were 127 principals in schools that fit the criteria for this study. All 127 principals were included in the population for the study. Of the 127 principals who were sent survey instruments, 90 principals or 71% responded.

Research Design

This study attempted to ascertain the level of burnout among high school principals in Mississippi; to ascertain if certain demographic variables may contribute to burnout in high school principals; and to determine if there is a relationship between burnout and personality type. The nature of the study necessitated a descriptive/comparative research methodology utilizing a survey as a means of collecting data.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected using a survey consisting of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), Part One of the Leadership/Personality Compatibility Inventory (L/PCI), and a demographic survey. The three instruments were mailed to the principals in October of 1993. A cover

letter explained the purpose of the survey and requested that the survey instruments be returned "as soon as possible" in the self-addressed, stamped envelope enclosed with the instruments. Seventy-two instruments were received within a week and a half of distribution. A second request was made to non-respondents two weeks after the first request. Eighteen instruments were received following the second request. Thus, a total of 90 principals or 71% responded to the survey. Of the 90 surveys returned, three contained incomplete data.

Statistical analyses included only those surveys containing complete data (n =87). This approach is supported by Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, and Brent (1975), because valid comparisons can be made among the results obtained only when all analyses are performed on the same universe of data using a sufficiently large sample.

The Instruments

The instruments selected to gather data necessary to conduct the study were the Leadership/Personality Compatibility Inventory (L/PCI) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The Leadership/Personality Compatibility Inventory is an instrument that is designed to determine and understand three major factors affecting leadership:

1. Personality style
2. Present (or desired) leadership role, and

3. The compatibility between personality style and leadership role (Brewer, 1984).

The L/PCI is divided into two major parts. Part One is a Personality Inventory; Part Two is to determine Leadership Role Characteristics.

The L/PCI has been used extensively throughout the state of Mississippi in numerous administrative training settings to help administrators and potential administrators determine and understand the factors affecting leadership. However, for this study, only Part One of the L/PCI was utilized.

The Leadership and Personality Compatibility Inventory was adapted and expanded from the works of Marston and Hermann. Based upon their adaptation, a description of the four basic personality types, called B.E.S.T, was developed (Brewer, Ainsworth & Wynne, 1987). The brief description of each type below was taken from the L/PCI instrument (Brewer, 1984.)

The Bold personality is stimulated by the challenge of a new adventure. There is a need for dominance over the situation and other people. The Bold style individual likes straightforward communications which may give the impression of bluntness. He/she is independent and likes to work alone.

The Expressive personality is stimulated by being around others and persuading them to his/her point of view. There is a need to be an influence over others. The Expressive individual likes to talk and is generally good at it.

The Sympathetic personality is most often patient, dependable, loyal, and a good listener. The Sympathetic style individual likes security and the status quo.

The Technical personality is one who is controlled, cautious, precise and rule oriented. The Technical style individual has an orientation toward planning and accuracy. At times, he/she may be called a perfectionist. The Technical style individual likes to be thorough and is serious about quality standards. He/she tries to reduce risks through logical thinking, is persuaded by facts, and is willing to listen to them.

Perceived principal burnout was assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The test form labeled "Human Services Survey" was used so that the respondents would not know that the focus of the instrument was on burnout.

The MBI is a twenty-two item, self-report measure (Green & Walkey, 1988). The reliability and validity of the inventory are well established (Maslach, 1981; Whitaker, 1992). The MBI measures the three aspects of the burnout syndrome-emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment--and is now the most widely used index of burnout in both research studies and organizational programs. These three aspects of the MBI have a high level of consistency with Cronbach alphas of .90 for

emotional exhaustion, .79 for depersonalization, and .71 for personal accomplishment (Whitaker, 1992).

Each aspect of the MBI is measured by a separate subscale. The Emotional subscale assesses feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one's work. The Depersonalization subscale measures an unfeeling and impersonal response towards recipients of one's service, care, treatment, or instruction. The Personal Accomplishment subscale assesses feelings of competence and successful achievement in one's work with people. The frequency that the respondent experiences feelings related to each subscale is assessed using a six-point, fully anchored response format (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Burnout is conceptualized as a continuous variable, ranging from low to moderate to high degrees of experienced feeling. It is not viewed as a dichotomous variable, which is either present or absent (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Maslach and Jackson explain the degrees of experienced feelings as follows:

> A high degree of burnout is reflected in high scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales and in low scores on the Personal subscale.
>
> An average degree of burnout is reflected in average scores on the three subscales.
>
> A low degree of burnout is reflected in low scores on the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalization subscales and in high scores on the Personal Accomplishment subscale
> (p.2).

A high level of burnout was indicated if scores were as follows: emotional exhaustion, high scores of 27 and over; depersonalization, high scores of 13 and over; and personal accomplishment, low scores of 0-31. A moderate level of burnout was indicated by moderate scores for each of the subscales: emotional exhaustion, 17-26; depersonalization, 7-12; and personal accomplishment, 32-38. A low level of burnout was indicated by low scores in emotional exhaustion, 0-16, and depersonalization, 0-6, and by high scores in personal accomplishment, 39 and over.

Included with the L/PCI and the MBI was a separate page to obtain demographic information. The demographic component of the survey was developed to collect the following data: race, sex, age, level of education, years of experience, school enrollment, and intent to remain in the principalship.

Statistical Analyses

For the purpose of this study, descriptive statistics were used to describe the level of burnout, the type of personality, and to present the demographic information. Descriptive statistics were also utilized to determine if burnout occurred more frequently with a particular personality type, and to determine if burnout occurred more frequently with a particular group within the demographic variables of age, sex, race, years of experience in the principalship, level of education, and school enrollment.

To test the hypotheses posed, the Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized when the analysis involved two categories. The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance was utilized when three or more categories were compared. The criteria for rejection of all hypotheses was set at the .05 level of significance.

Research Findings

A study by Whitaker (1992) supports the findings of this study. That is, a majority of the principals felt a sense of personal accomplishments in their jobs; however, they were experiencing some emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. This research study found that a sizable number of principals experienced either moderate or high emotional exhaustion on the job. The results of the study also indicated a sizable number of principals felt a sense of depersonalization in their roles.

Studies by Cedoline (1982) and Seligmann and Huck (1978) found that large numbers of principals were leaving or planning to leave the principalship. This study did not support their findings. Surprisingly, only 16% of the principals participating in this study indicated plans to leave the principalship.

A description of the population on specific demographic variables resulted in the following findings. There were 30 black principals and 57 white principals. Eighty principals were males and seven were females. Most of the respondents,

43%, had education at the masters level, while 18% had doctorates, and 26% had specialists. There were no principals between the ages of 25 and 34; however, most respondents (63.2%) fell within the 45 to 54 category. A small number (6.9%) were 55 or older. Twenty-nine percent of the principals had between six and ten years of experience as principals. Most principals (37.9%) worked in schools with enrollments that fell between 500 and 999. Seventy-three (83.9%) of the principals indicated that they intended to remain in the principalship.

A summary of the principals' personality types indicated that principals with a technical personality (35.6 %) outnumbered all other personality types. The bold personality had the next highest percentage (27.6%) followed by the expressive personality (19.5), and the sympathetic personality (17.2).

An analysis of the Maslach burnout subscales indicated a mean score of 19.24 on the emotional subscale and a mean score of 7.32 on the depersonalization subscale. The mean score on the personal accomplishment subscale was 39.13.

A high level of burnout was indicated if scores were as follows: emotional exhaustion, high scores of 27 and over; depersonalization, high scores of 13 and over; and personal accomplishment, low scores of 0-31. A moderate level of burnout was indicated by moderate scores for each of the subscales: emotional exhaustion, 17-26; depersonalization, 7-

12; and personal accomplishment, 32-38. A low level of burnout was indicated by low scores in emotional exhaustion, 0-16, and depersonalization, 0-6, and by high scores in personal accomplishment, 39 and over.

A descriptive analysis of the research population found that the majority of principals in Mississippi high schools have low levels of burnout on the emotional exhaustion subscale (45%) and the depersonalization subscale (52%). A sizable number, however, have a high level burnout on the emotional exhaustion subscale (29%) and a moderate level on the depersonalization subscale (31%).

Data Analysis Related to the Hypotheses

The research hypotheses were presented to examine the relationship of burnout to the demographic variables of age, sex, race, years of experience, level of education, and student enrollment among high school principals in Mississippi. The hypotheses also examined the relationship between burnout and personality type. Seven hypotheses were developed to reflect the research problem.

Conclusions Related to the Hypotheses

The conclusions for this study were based upon the concept of significance. The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure was utilized to test the significance between the three age categories on each of the MBI subscales (Hypothesis 1). This analysis revealed that

the three age categories on the MBI subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment were not significant.

The Mann-Whitney U statistical procedure was used to test for significance of Hypothesis 2. This procedure revealed no significant difference between males and females on the MBI subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

The Mann-Whitney U statistical procedure was used to test Hypothesis 3 for significance between the two racial groups, Black and White. An analysis of the data using the Mann-Whitney U test showed no significance between racial groups (black and white) or any of the subscales.

Hypothesis 4 was tested utilizing the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure. The Kruskal-Wallis analyzed the significance among the five specific categories of years of experience on each of the MBI subscales. This analysis revealed that the five categories of experience on the MBI subscales of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment did not differ significantly.

Hypothesis 5 was tested using the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance procedure. This procedure was executed to compute the levels of education on the MBI subscales. No significant difference on the emotional exhaustion or depersonalization subscales was revealed.

A significant difference was found between the three groups on the personal accomplishment subscale. Due to the finding of significance on the personal accomplishment subscale, it was necessary to locate where the significant differences occurred; therefore, a Mann-Whitney U test was utilized. A significant difference was found between the doctorate and the specialist levels ($p=.0202$) and between the doctorate and the masters levels ($p=.0336$) on the personal accomplishment subscale. Those principals with the doctorate had a significantly higher degree of personal satisfaction than those principals with the specialist and masters degrees. No significant difference was found in personal accomplishment between those principals with specialists and masters degrees ($p=.7005$).

For Hypothesis 6, the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure was utilized to test the significance between the three enrollment categories on each of the MBI subscales. This analysis revealed no significance.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance statistical procedure revealed a significant difference between personality types on the MBI subscale of emotional exhaustion. No difference was found between personality type and the subscales of depersonalization or personal accomplishment.

To locate where the significant differences occurred, a

Mann-Whitney U test was utilized. A significant difference was found between the bold and sympathetic personalities ($p=.0110$) and between the sympathetic and technical personalities ($p=.0095$). Those principals with a sympathetic personality had a significantly higher level of emotional exhaustion than those with bold and technical personalities. No significant differences were found in emotional exhaustion between those principals with bold and expressive personalities; bold and technical personalities; expressive and sympathetic personalities; or between expressive and technical personalities.

Concluding Statement

The findings of this study indicate that high school principals in Mississippi have low to moderate levels of burnout as measured by the subscales of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. The study also revealed that high school principals in Mississippi felt a high degree of personal accomplishment in their work. However, since a sizable number of the principals were experiencing moderate or high levels of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in their roles, there is reason for concern. Afterall, it is paramount that principals entrusted with the education and well-being of students be mentally and physically healthy.

Table 1

Description of Population by Frequency and Percentage of Specific Demographic Variable Categories

Demographic Variable	N	%
Race		
Black	30	34.5
White	57	65.5
Sex		
Male	80	92.0
Female	7	8.0
Age		
35-44	26	29.9
45-54	55	63.2
55 or over	6	6.9
Years Experience		
1-5	26	29.9
6-10	29	33.3
11-15	14	16.1
16-20	4	4.6
21 or more	14	16.1
Education		
Doctorate	18	20.7
Specialist	26	29.9
Masters	43	49.4
Enrollment		
100-499	30	34.5
500-999	33	37.9
1000 or more	24	27.6
Intent to Remain		
Yes	73	83.9
No	14	16.1

Table 2

Description of Population's Personality Types by Frequency and Percentages

Personality Type	N	%
Bold	24	27.6
Expressive	17	19.5
Sympathetic	15	17.2
Technical	31	35.6

Table 3

Description of Maslach Burnout Subscales by Frequency and Percentages

Burnout Subscale	N	M	SD
Emotional Exhaustion	87	19.24	10.87
Depersonalization	87	7.32	5.02
Personal Accomplishment	87	39.13	6.54

Table 4

Description of Population on the MBI by Frequency and Percentages

Scale		N	%
EE*			
0-16	(Low)	39	45
17-26	(Moderate)	23	26
27 & over	(High)	25	29
DP			
0-6	(Low)	45	52
7-12	(Moderate)	27	31
13 & over	(High)	15	17
PA			
0-31	(Low)	10	11
32-38	(Moderate)	27	31
39 & over	(High)	50	58

*EE = Emotional Exhaustion
DP = Depersonalization
PA = Personal Accomplishment

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